

George Gale



SPYING is a waste of time. Once the Russians caught up with nuclear weapons and delivery systems, spies became redundant.

Nuclear deterrence depends upon the other side actually knowing what you've got and what you intend to do with it. The more the KGB knows about us, the better.

But you cannot expect spies to take this line. In any case, they are chiefly interested in each other. Just like the Sicilians, who lived by taking in each other's washing, spies live by spying on each other.

The Russians spy on the Americans. The Americans spy back, but keep a weather eye on the British, whose spies they abhor and distrust. The British, when they are not spying for the Russians and the Americans, spy on themselves.

The Israelis, who have the best spy set-up in the world, spy because they love it and are very good at it and are ready to do it for just about nothing.

We ought to open up our "top-secret" communications headquarters at Cheltenham to the general public and appoint a Press officer or two. Redundant spies could become guides to our nuclear bases, and George Smiley could finally retire. Positive vetting could then be left at last to vets, and homosexuals to their own devices.

Our spies have done us much more harm than good since the war. They are expensive and inefficient. They display us at our worst when they seek to sell us down the river.

Have done with them, I say. They belong entirely to a bygone world.

THIRTY years ago or so I joined the National Trust. It seemed to me then, and still does, to be an admirable charity.

I have been more than content to pay my subscription each year and to leave the affairs of the Trust in the hands of the Trust's council, advisers and employees. It is rather a stuffy organisation, as befits the country's greatest land and property owner, and none the worse for that.

The stately running of the National Trust is now endangered. A bunch of politically-motivated pacifists and nuclear disarmers are up in arms, objecting to a lease given by the Trust to the Ministry of Defence of a field which the RAF wants. The field is of no great beauty, is part of no outstanding view, has a pylon on it and is next to some existing RAF buildings.

But it is "inalienable" land given to the Trust, and a great fuss against the Trust for granting the lease has been raised.

The Trust's million or so members have been circularised, a postal ballot is now being conducted, the Electoral Reform Society will count the votes, and a week on Saturday we will know whether the National Trust's members have upheld the existing management or carried a vote of no confidence in it.

Lord Gibson, the Trust's chairman, is pretty confident he'll win the day. He reckons that about 200,000 members will vote, and that, among these, the malcontents might number 30,000 or 40,000.

"What worries me," he tells me, "is the precedent that's been set. We'll have the League Against Cruel Sports after us next, trying to make us ban hunting."

His fears are well-justified. The animal-lovers could well capture the RSPCA, and thereafter threaten the National Trust itself. Animal lovers, when aroused, are even more war-like and hostile than militant pacifists.

But my mouth is where my money has been for 30 years — with the National Trust, the acceptable face of the Establishment, conservation at its conservative best.

If the National Trust cannot fix its critics, confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks, what hope is left for Tory England?

IT was bad enough when Sir Robert Mark, having retired as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, promptly started advertising tyres.

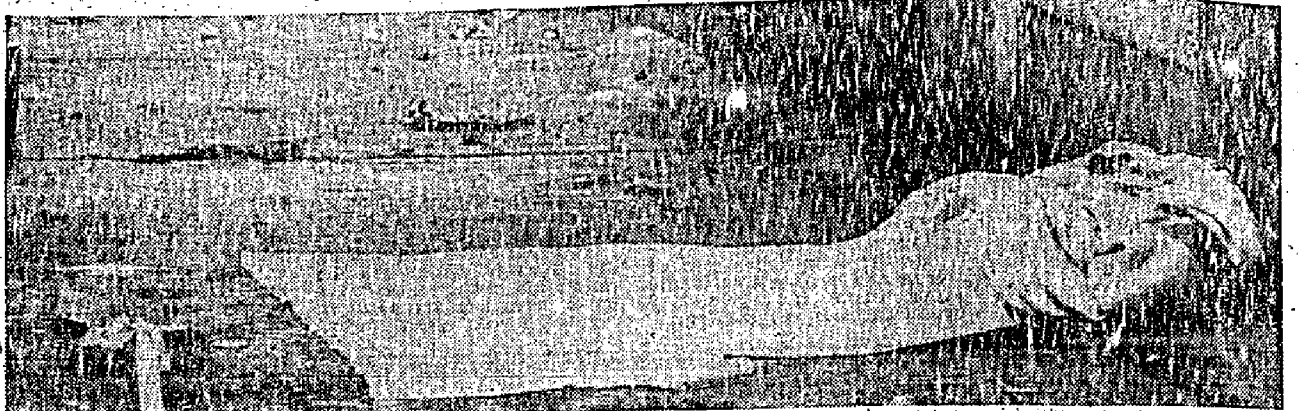
It was worse when Sir David McNee, his successor, sold his memoirs to a Sunday newspaper for a reported £120,000 the minute he turned his back on Scotland Yard.

What are coppers on the beat to think, when they see their top policemen thus selling themselves — What is the public to think, come to that?

I know what I think of Mark and McNee. I hope that when McNee's successor, Sir Kenneth Newman, comes to retire, I will be able to think better of him.

READ GEORGE GALE EACH MONDAY
AND WEDNESDAY IN THE EXPRESS

The horrifying truth behind the catalogue of Ulster killings



Yet another victim... Joe Donegan's body lies in a Belfast backstreet—from yesterday's Express

Who are the primitives now?



By GEOFFREY LEVY

SOMEONE, somewhere, in an Irish bar is bound to be scribbling a brave ballad about it.

In an Orange Lodge other men will be wishing it were already next July 12—their traditional annual march—so they did not have to strut in secret.

The search for the body of part time UDR sergeant Tom Cochrane goes on. For the sake of his widow it would probably be best left undiscovered.

We know only that he has been killed—"executed," as the Provisional IRA in South Armagh so formally put it.

But what happened to Cochrane—seized from his motor bike as he rode to work at a linen mill on Friday—in the hours before his death?

Fanatics

We may never know. But the clues lie in the huddled body of Cochrane's tit-for-tat Catholic victim Joe Donegan, "lifted," as they say, by the fanatical Protestant group, the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Donegan, father of seven and a man with no political links, was battered so ferociously about the head that he could be identified only by his watch. There were further signs of mutilation by knife.

Killing, you see, is no longer enough to satisfy the lust for vengeance of the swaggering "heroes" on both sides of the conflict.

Before the coup de grace is delivered, they often torture their victim.

In 13 years what began civilly enough as tarring

and feathering has degenerated into the ritual blood-letting of jungle savages.

The sub-human level to which the civil war has sunk is best illustrated in the death of a 19-year-old boy but for the evening with his girlfriend when lifted by a sectarian killer gang.

They sent the girl scuttling away into the night. Then they took the boy to a "safe" house.

He was a total stranger, a non-activist like Joe Donegan.

When his body was found the following morning the Ulster police put out a statement that there had been another sectarian killing.

The victim, they said, had been shot through the head. Indeed he had. What was not disclosed was what had been done to him before he was killed.

His finger nails had been pulled out with pincers; the skin on one arm had been rolled up to the elbow; his throat was cut. Then a single bullet put him out of his misery.

Details of such atrocities for years have been played down by the authorities in the hope of keeping the temperature down, for it is natural for each side to try to outdo the other.

In this, as in so many other matters, the authorities are deluding themselves. Within hours, the other side will have the bloody details and will be dispatching a vengeance squad of its own.

They have resurrected the primitive tribal taunt of removing an enemy's genitals and stuffing them into his mouth.

Torture

Others are executed, after torture, by shooting through the anal orifice.

They have introduced a religious touch in the practice of inscribing a holy cross on the victim's chest... in bullet holes.

Knee-capping—putting a bullet through the crown of the knee-cap—has largely been superseded by the electric drill, operated at slow speed to bore

through the knee joint from the back.

Sometimes the atrocity—over and above the killing itself—may be an attack on the mind only.

Perhaps the worst such incident involved a young couple and their 10-year-old son, kidnapped as they left a Belfast cinema.

The parents were shot dead through the head. In the early hours of the morning a passer-by heard whimpering coming from a newspaper van parked and locked in a dim side street. He called the police.

Corpses

They found the boy in the back of the van, physically unharmed but cowering on the corpses of his mother and father.

That, if you like, was a psychological atrocity that succeeded in torturing the whole community, for the story got out.

This, then, is what the killings in Ulster's civil war are all about.

In little more than half a generation, the Irish have managed to wipe out the belief of everyone in this island that we are the most civilised people on earth.

They have proved that Idi Amin is by no means unique. In the eyes of most people, Amin had an excuse—he was mad.

The same may perhaps be said of Hitler.

When the Congo—now Zaïre—erupted into the most hideous massacres in the early 'sixties, we shrugged and talked sagely of primitives.

Who are the primitives now?

• Sub-human lust for vengeance that often leads to torture •